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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ), including information on how the MRQ can be used and how to administer and score it. The MRQ assesses 11 possible dimensions of reading motivations. It can be used with children in late elementary school and middle school. Scores on the MRQ have been shown to relate to children's reported reading frequency, and their performance on different standardized tests. It can be used in various ways in schools: for instance, to generate profiles of children's motivations change over the course of a school year, or to see how boys' and girls' reading motivations differ. Contains 13 references and 2 tables of data. The Motivations for Reading Questionnaire is attached. (Author/RS)

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Instructional Resource No. 22
Spring 1996

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University of Maryland College Park

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE NO. 22
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A Questionnaire Measure of Children's Motivations For Reading

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Universities of Georgia and Maryland
Instructional Resource No. 22
Spring 1996

Abstract. *In this Instructional Resource we describe the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). We provide information about how the MRQ can be used, and how to administer and score it. The MRQ assesses 11 possible dimensions of reading motivations. It can be used with children in late elementary school and middle school. Scores on the MRQ have been shown to relate to children's reported reading frequency, and their performance on different standardized tests. It can be used in various ways in schools; for instance, to generate profiles of children's motivations change over the course of a school year, or to see how boys' and girls' reading motivations differ.*

The Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) is designed to assess different aspects of children's motivations for reading. It is well-known that children's motivation can affect their performance in different achievement areas, including reading (for further discussion, see Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996, Wigfield, 1994, and Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). However, few measures of children's motivations *for reading* exist, which has made it difficult to assess the ways in which children are motivated (or not motivated) to read, and to assess the relation of reading motivations to achievement in reading. The engagement perspective that provides the theoretical framework for much of the ongoing work at the National Reading Research Center emphasizes the importance of motivation to engaged reading. A survey of IRA members done in 1992 indicated that students' motivation (or lack of motivation) to read was one of teachers' greatest concerns. Therefore, it is important to obtain a better understanding of children's reading motivations, and to devise tools to measure reading motivations.

Development of the MRQ

To develop the MRQ, we integrated research from both the general motivation literature and work on literacy motivations. Motivational researchers have proposed and investigated what they consider to be the most important motivational constructs that mediate achievement behavior (for further discussion of these constructs, see Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996, and Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). Yet most of the work of these researchers has been on motivation in general rather than motivation for specific areas such as reading. Literacy researchers have looked at what engages children and adults in reading, but often only consider some of the constructs defined by

motivation theorists in their discussions of reading engagement. Therefore, measures developed by these researchers have assessed more general attitudes toward reading (e.g., Alexander & Filler, 1976; McKenna & Kear, 1990) rather than specific dimensions of reading motivations stemming from motivation theory.

To integrate both these areas into the questionnaire, we first developed a set of possible dimensions or constructs that could comprise reading motivations, and wrote items to measure those dimensions. We then interviewed a small group of children to see how they described their own motivations for reading, and modified some of the items following these interviews (for more detailed discussion, see Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995).

The first two dimensions assess children's sense of competence and efficacy in reading, constructs that are prominent in many motivation theories. These theorists (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Wigfield, 1994) propose that individuals are more likely to do tasks or activities when they think they can master the activity. Therefore, to succeed in reading children need to believe they can read. We call these dimensions *Reading Efficacy*, the belief that one can be successful at reading, and *Reading Challenge*, the satisfaction of mastering or assimilating complex ideas in text.

The next set of dimensions are based on theoretical work on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Motivation theorists in this area propose that intrinsic motivation, or the interest and enjoyment one gets from an activity, is a powerful motivational force (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1981). We developed three dimensions on the MRQ that assess aspects of intrinsic motivation: *Reading Curiosity*, the desire to learn about a particular topic of interest to the child; *Reading Topics Aesthetically Enjoyed*, or the enjoyment of experiencing different kinds of literary or informational texts; and *Importance of Reading*, which is a dimension taken from Eccles' and Wigfield's (e.g., Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) work on the nature of individual's valuing of different tasks or activities. The notion of aesthetic enjoyment gained from reading refers to the pleasure gained from reading a well-written book or article on a topic one finds interesting. Although similar in certain ways to intrinsic motivation to read, this kind of aesthetic enjoyment is something we thought to be unique to the reading area, and so is different from traditional definitions of intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation means being motivated to obtain something (like a reward or good grade) for doing an activity; thus the motivation is not for the activity itself, but for what the activity will bring the individual. In the MRQ, we distinguished different kinds of extrinsic motivation for reading. *Recognition for Reading* is the gratification in receiving a tangible form of recognition for success in reading; and *Reading for Grades* assesses the desire to be favorably evaluated by the teacher. These different aspects of extrinsic motivation reflect the fact that children do much of their reading in school, where their reading performance is evaluated. Thus, recognition and grades may figure prominently in their motivations for reading.

The final dimensions include social aspects of reading, because reading often is a social activity. One proposed dimension is *Social Reasons for Reading*, or the process of sharing the meanings gained from reading with friends and family. A second is *Competition in Reading*, the desire to outperform others in reading. Third is *Compliance*, or reading because of an external goal or requirement. These dimensions are based on the work on achievement goals in the motivation literature (e.g., Ames, 1992; Wentzel, 1989). With the exception of Wentzel's (1989) work in the general motivation literature, social goals for achievement have not often been discussed. Such goals seem essential for reading motivation. Finally, a set of items asked students what they do not like about reading; we called this set *Reading Work Avoidance*.

An initial version of the MRQ containing 82 items was developed, with 7 or 8 items measuring each of the proposed dimensions (with the exception of reading importance, which was measured by an existing 2-item scale developed by Eccles et al., 1983). This scale was given to fourth and fifth graders in an elementary school in the fall and the spring of a school year. Various analyses of children's responses to the questionnaire were done to evaluate how well the items and scales worked. Based on these analyses (see Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995), 28 of the original 82 items were eliminated. The current version of the MRQ contains 54 items, and all the dimensions just described are measured by the remaining items. The items assessing each dimension are listed in Table 1. The full questionnaire and instructions for its administration and scoring appear with the questionnaire appear in the Appendix.

Reliability of the MRQ Scales

The internal consistency reliabilities of these scales were computed, at both the fall and spring times of measurement. These reliabilities give an indication of the extent to which the items on each scale cohere; values greater than .70 are preferable. The reliabilities are presented in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, some of the scales showed reasonable internal consistency, and others did not. The most reliable scales included Reading Challenge, Reading Curiosity, Aesthetic Enjoyment of Reading, Social Reasons for Reading, Reading Competition, and Reading Recognition. The reliabilities of these scales ranged from adequate to good. The reliabilities for the other scales were poorer (although some approached adequacy), suggesting that the items proposed to form these scales in fact did not cohere as well.

Uses of the MRQ

The MRQ can be used by teachers and reading specialists of children in grades three to six to gauge the ways in which children are motivated to read. It could be administered at the beginning and the end of a school year, to see what kinds of changes in reading motivations might have occurred during the year. It can be used to generate individual profiles of students' motivation, and also could be used to compare the motivations of different groups of children (e.g., boys vs. girls).

Table 1. Scales on The Motivations for Reading Questionnaire

READING EFFICACY

I know that I will do well in reading next year
I am a good reader
I learn more from reading than most students in the class
In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at reading

READING CHALLENGE

I like hard, challenging books
If the project is interesting, I can read difficult material
I like it when the questions in books make me think
I usually learn difficult things by reading
If a book is interesting, I don't care how hard it is to read

READING CURIOSITY

If the teacher discusses something interesting, I might read more about it
If I am reading about an interesting topic, I sometimes lose track of time
I read to learn new information about topics that interest me
I read about my hobbies to learn more about them
I like to read about new things
I enjoy reading books about people in different countries

AESTHETIC ENJOYMENT OF READING

I read stories about fantasy and make believe
I like mysteries
I make pictures in my mind when I read
I feel like I make friends with people in good books
I read a lot of adventure stories
I enjoy a long, involved story or fiction book

IMPORTANCE OF READING

It is very important to me to be a good reader
In comparison to other activities I do, it is very important to me to be a good reader

COMPLIANCE

I do as little schoolwork as possible in reading*
I read because I have to*
I always do my reading work exactly as the teacher wants it

Finishing every reading assignment is very important to me
I always try to finish my reading on time

READING RECOGNITION

I like having the teacher say I read well
My friends sometimes tell me I am a good reader
I like to get compliments for my reading
I am happy when someone recognizes my reading
My parents often tell me what a good job I am doing in reading

READING FOR GRADES

Grades are a good way to see how well you are doing in reading
I look forward to finding out my reading grade
I read to improve my grades
My parents ask me about my reading grade

SOCIAL REASONS FOR READING

I visit the library often with my family
I often read to my brother or my sister
My friends and I like to trade things to read
I sometimes read to my parents
I talk to my friends about what I am reading
I like to help my friends with their schoolwork in reading
I like to tell my family about what I am reading

READING COMPETITION

I try to get more answers right than my friends
I like being the best at reading
I like to finish my reading before other students
I like being the only one who knows an answer in something we read
It is important for me to see my name on a list of good readers
I am willing to work hard to read better than my friends

READING WORK AVOIDANCE

I don't like vocabulary questions
Complicated stories are no fun to read
I don't like reading something when the words are too difficult
I don't like it when there are too many people in the story

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* Reverse the direction of these two items when scoring them.

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Table 2. Reliabilities for the Reading Motivation Scales

SCALE	FALL	SPRING
Reading Efficacy	63	68
Reading Challenge	68	80
Reading Curiosity	70	76
Aesthetic Enjoyment of Reading	72	76
Importance of Reading	59	52
Reading Recognition	69	69
Reading for Grades	59	43
Social Reasons for Reading	78	72
Reading Competition	75	81
Compliance	62	55
Reading Work Avoidance	44	60

The MRQ can be administered to a class in approximately 20 to 25 min. When it is given to third- and fourth-grade children, it is recommended that the items be read aloud. Fifth- and sixth-grade children can read the items on their own, although they might need help with some of the words. The questionnaire can be used with the Reading Activity Inventory (Guthrie, McGough, & Wigfield, 1994) to see how children's motivations for reading relate to the kinds of reading that they do. It also is informative to relate children's motivations for reading to their reading performance and frequency (see Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995, for results of an analysis of the relations of reading motivations to reading frequency). Several of the motivation scales relate moderately strongly to the amount of reading children did.

The current version of the MRQ can provide teachers with valuable information about children's reading motivations. We are continuing to revise the questionnaire; the revised version will appear in a subsequent instructional resource.

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APPENDIX

MOTIVATIONS FOR READING QUESTIONNAIRE

Administration and Scoring

The Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) measures different dimensions or aspects of elementary school-aged children's reading motivations. It can be used to discover the nature of children's motivations for reading, as well as some of the things about reading children do not find motivating. It consists of 54 items, and can be administered in 20 to 25 minutes. It can be used in conjunction with the Reading Activity Inventory developed by Guthrie et al. (1994).

The MRQ appears following these instructions. It may be photocopied for use in the classroom.

Administration

Before you distribute the MRQ forms, tell students you are interested in finding out what they think and feel about reading as an activity. Assure the students that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and that children sitting near them might answer an item differently. Encourage the students to answer the questions honestly. The measure is designed to be given to a classroom-size group; it also can be given in smaller groups. Individual administration generally is not necessary.

For third- and fourth-grade children, it is recommended that the MRQ be read aloud (if all students in a fourth-grade class read well, then they could complete the questionnaire on their own). Fifth- and sixth-grade children can read the questions on their own, but the administrator should be prepared to answer any questions they have about some of the words contained in the different items.

A cover page can be added to the questionnaire to get demographic and other information, if that is desired. The first page of the questionnaire contains three sample questions that are there to familiarize children with the 1 to 4 answer scales used. The class should complete these sample items before answering the items on the questionnaire itself. The administrator should emphasize to children to use the full range of the 1 to 4 scale.

Scoring

Each item is scored on a 1 to 4 scale; higher scores mean stronger endorsement of the item. A total score can be derived by summing the scores of all the items (with the exception of the Work Avoidance items; these should NOT be included in a summary score). However, we strongly recommend deriving separate scores for each of the proposed dimensions of reading motivations. The scale scores provide much more information than a total score does. Specifically, they provide information about the pattern of children's responses and how they rate different aspects of their motivation for reading. These profiles could be quite useful for teachers and reading specialists interested in understanding what things children like about reading and what things they don't like about it.

SPECIFIC STEPS FOR SCORING THE INSTRUMENT BY HAND

1. Check each questionnaire to be sure that each student completed each item. If some items are left blank, they of course should not be included in the scoring of the instrument. Each item that is completed should be scored from 1 to 4.

2. If a student circled more than one answer for an item and the answers are adjacent (e.g., circled both 1 or 2; or 3 or 4), take the number closer to the middle. However, if both 1 and 4 were circled, that item should not be counted.

3. If a student added numbers to the scale (e.g., the student wrote in numbers less than 1, or greater than 4), convert them to the scale. Numbers less than 1 can be scored as 1; numbers greater than 4 can be scored as 4.

3. To create scale scores, use Table 1 to identify the items in each scale. Add the students' responses to the items in each scale (e.g., in the case of the Efficacy items, add the scores from the four items shown in Table 1), and divide by the number of items completed (e.g., in the case of the efficacy scale, divide by 4, if all the items were completed by the student). Dividing by the number of items on each scale means that all the scale scores also will have a range of 1 to 4, which makes them easier to compare.

4. For the Compliance scale, the first two items should be reversed before computing the scale for Compliance. That is, a score of 1 should be converted to 4, a score of 2 converted to 3, a score of 3 converted to 2, and a score of 4 converted to 1.

SPECIFIC STEPS FOR SCORING THE INSTRUMENT BY COMPUTER

The scales also can be created using different statistical packages, such as SPSS.

1. Follow steps 1 through 3 above.

2. To create scale scores, use Table 1 to identify the items in each scale. Use your computer program to add the appropriate items for each scale, being sure to reverse the first two items on the Compliance scale.

3. The scale scores can be saved on the computer for later use and analysis.

Interpretation

The scores can be used in several ways. First, individual profiles of the students completing the questionnaire can be examined. This profile can help give an indication of the kinds of things a child is motivated by. For instance, does s/he read primarily for curiosity, or to get good grades? Does s/he like to be challenged by reading assignments? These profiles could be used to tailor the curriculum to meet better individual student needs, or perhaps to provide special activities for different students. For instance, children who strongly endorse the "challenge" items could be given some especially involved assignments. Children strongly endorsing the "recognition" items could be given the opportunity to receive some recognition for their work. Children strongly endorsing "social reasons for reading" could be allowed to read more with their peers. Second, the scores also could be grouped, and group differences could be examined, to answer questions like are the boys more positively motivated than the girls? Or do boys and girls have different things that appear to motivate them most in their reading? Third, the measure could be given twice or three times over a school year, and patterns of change in different children's motivations could be assessed.

The Motivations For Reading Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS:

We are interested in your reading.

The statements tell how some students feel about reading.

Read each statement and decide whether it talks about a person who is like you or different from you.

There are no right or wrong answers. We only want to know how you feel about reading.

Here are three examples.

If the statement is **very different from you**, circle a 1.

If the statement is **a little different from you**, circle a 2.

If the statement is **a little like you**, circle a 3.

If the statement is **a lot like you**, circle a 4.

	Very Different From Me	A Little Different From Me	A Little Like Me	A Lot Like Me
1. I like ice cream.	1	2	3	4
2. I like to swim.	1	2	3	4
3. I like spinach.	1	2	3	4

CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION, USING THESE ANSWERS:

1. Very different from me
2. A little different from me
3. A little like me
4. A lot like me

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1. I visit the library often with my family.	1	2	3	4
2. I like hard, challenging books.	1	2	3	4
3. I know that I will do well in reading next year.	1	2	3	4
4. I do as little schoolwork as possible in reading.	1	2	3	4
5. If the teacher discusses something interesting I might read more about it.	1	2	3	4
6. I read because I have to.	1	2	3	4
7. I like it when the questions in books make me think.	1	2	3	4
8. I read about my hobbies to learn more about them.	1	2	3	4
9. I am a good reader.	1	2	3	4
10. I read stories about fantasy and make believe.	1	2	3	4
11. I often read to my brother or my sister.	1	2	3	4
12. I like being the only one who knows an answer in something we read.	1	2	3	4
13. I read to learn new information about topics that interest me.	1	2	3	4
14. My friends sometimes tell me I'm a good reader.	1	2	3	4
15. I learn more from reading than most students in my class.	1	2	3	4
16. I like to read about new things.	1	2	3	4
17. I like hearing the teacher say I read well.	1	2	3	4
18. I like being the best at reading.	1	2	3	4

CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION, USING THESE ANSWERS:

1. Very different from me
2. A little different from me
3. A little like me
4. A lot like me

---

19. I look forward to finding out my reading grade.	1	2	3	4
20. I sometimes read to my parents.	1	2	3	4
21. My friends and I like to trade things to read.	1	2	3	4
22. It is important for me to see my name on a list of good readers.	1	2	3	4
23. I don't like reading something when the words are too difficult.	1	2	3	4
24. I make pictures in my mind when I read.	1	2	3	4
25. I always do my reading work exactly as the teacher wants it.	1	2	3	4
26. I usually learn difficult things by reading.	1	2	3	4
27. I don't like vocabulary questions.	1	2	3	4
28. Complicated stories are no fun to read.	1	2	3	4
29. I am happy when someone recognizes my reading.	1	2	3	4
30. I feel like I make friends with people in good books.	1	2	3	4
31. My parents often tell me what a good job I'm doing in reading.	1	2	3	4
32. Finishing every reading assignment is very important to me.	1	2	3	4
33. I like mysteries.	1	2	3	4
34. I talk to my friends about what I am reading.	1	2	3	4

CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION, USING THESE ANSWERS:

1. Very different from me
2. A little different from me
3. A little like me
4. A lot like me

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35. If I am reading about an interesting topic, I sometimes lose track of time.	1	2	3	4
36. I like to get compliments for my reading.	1	2	3	4
37. Grades are a good way to see how I'm doing in reading.	1	2	3	4
38. I like to help my friends with their schoolwork in reading.	1	2	3	4
39. I read to improve my grades.	1	2	3	4
40. My parents ask me about my reading grade.	1	2	3	4
41. I enjoy a long, involved story or fiction book.	1	2	3	4
42. I like to tell my family about what I am reading.	1	2	3	4
43. I try to get more answers right than my friends.	1	2	3	4
44. If the project is interesting, I can read difficult material.	1	2	3	4
45. I enjoy reading books about people living in different countries.	1	2	3	4
46. I read a lot of adventure stories.	1	2	3	4
47. I always try to finish my reading on time.	1	2	3	4
48. If a book is interesting, I don't care how hard it is to read.	1	2	3	4
49. I like to finish my reading before other students.	1	2	3	4
50. In comparison to my other school subjects, I am best at reading.	1	2	3	4

CIRCLE ONE ANSWER FOR EACH QUESTION, USING THESE ANSWERS:

1. Very different from me
2. A little different from me
3. A little like me
4. A lot like me

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51. I am willing to work hard to read better than my friends.	1	2	3	4
52. I don't like it when there are too many people in the story.	1	2	3	4
53. It is very important to me to be a good reader.	1	2	3	4
54. In comparison to other activities I do, it is very important for me to be good at reading.	1	2	3	4

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